
IRAQ

In the wake of its invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 and subsequent repulsion and military defeat by Operation Desert Storm, Iraq remains isolated. The trade, economic, and other sanctions implemented by the United Nations remain in place substantially unaltered after almost seven years, resulting in a devastated economy and limited post-war reconstruction. It is the only country in the Persian Gulf region with no Internet connection.

Formerly reasonably well-off—Iraq is classed as a “lower-middle income country,” with a pre-war GDP per capita comparable to Panama and Poland (Table 71)—and with a Western-educated management and academic establishment, Iraq was establishing a modern information technology infrastructure, principally through technology imports, and was developing an IT industrial base. Two of the most popular brands of PCs in Iraq were assembled locally: Salah al-Din and al-Waqqah. They incorporated i80486, 5x86 (AMD or Cyrix Pentium clones), and Pentium processors. The IT industrial base and infrastructure are essentially non-existent today.

Metric	Value ²⁸¹	Remarks
Population	20.45	millions, 1995
Population density	47	per km ² , 1995
GDP	48.7	US\$billions, 1994 estimate
GDP per capita	2,691	US\$, 1994
Telephones	675.0	thousands, 1990
Teledensity	3.30	per 100 inhabitants, 1990
Teledensity in largest city	na	
Cellular subscribers	0	No system installed
Cellular density	na	
PCs	na	
PC density	na	
Television sets (receivers)	1,450	thousands, 1995 estimate
Television density	7.4	per 100 inhabitants, 1995 estimate
Literacy rate	58.0 ²⁸²	per 100 inhabitants older than 15 years, 1995
Infant mortality	60.0 ²⁸³	per 1000 inhabitants, 1996 estimate

Networking in Iraq

There was a nationwide data network that had been established by the Ministry of Industry by 1990. Among the data network’s other members were Baghdad University and the National Library. There were plans at that time to establish a nationwide library network, as well, sponsored by the Iraqi Library Association.²⁸⁴ The network no longer exists.

A research center and database system, the Regional Documentation Center (RDC) of the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (AGCC), had its headquarters at al-Mustansiriyah University in Baghdad, where it had been established in 1982. The RDC had data connections with the other six members of the AGCC and about 1,000 dial-up users by December 1989. The center also had connections to Dialog and other Western database vendors; these links were cut on 2 August 1990. The network provided database search and file retrieval services only; there were no e-mail capabilities.²⁸⁵ The current status of this network is not known.

²⁸¹ Source: *World Telecommunication Development Report*, 3rd ed., 1996/97 (Geneva: International Telecommunications Union, March 1997), unless otherwise noted.

²⁸² *The World Factbook 1996*, <<http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/nsolo/factbook/iz.htm>> (9 February 1998).

²⁸³ *ibid.*

²⁸⁴ Dr. Jassim Mohammed Jirjees, personal communication, Sana’a, Yemen (25 May 1997). Dr. Jirjees is former head of the Iraqi Library Association.

²⁸⁵ *ibid.*

The Internet does not exist in Iraq. There are no known domestic TCP/IP-based networks, nor any international communications links to the Internet. Some Iraqis may access the Internet via an international telephone call to a foreign access provider, but the scarcity of direct-dial international lines, the poor quality of the available telephone circuits, and the difficulty of paying for Internet access in the face of the international embargo all suggest this is a rare event, if it occurs at all.

A top-level domain has been registered with the InterNIC for Iraq, but no block of IP numbers has been assigned. The administrative contact for the .iq TLD is a Saud Alani, with a Baghdad telephone number, through his Alani Corporation, located in Richardson, Texas. Other companies associated with Alani Corporation include Valnet Corporation (mynet.net) and InfoCom (infocomusa.com), both located at the same address in Texas. Bayan Elashi is the technical contact for both the .iq TLD and InfoCom.

Despite the high level of international interest in and attention regarding Iraq and the presence of large émigré communities in Europe and North America, there are relatively few Worldwide Web sites dedicated to Iraq or sponsored by Iraqi opposition groups. The busiest site is that of Iraq Net (www.iraq.net), which is maintained by CyberTent Consulting in Michigan and has had several hundred thousand visitors since its inception. The two principal opposition groups, the Iraqi National Congress (INC) and the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), are based in London, UK, and maintain Web pages on servers in that city (www.inc.org.uk and ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/sciri/, respectively). Both pages provide news reports, mainly from their own sources, and links to other sites regarding the situation in Iraq. The INC site has been on-line for almost eight months, and averages more than 3,000 visits per month. The INC site also has a link to the UK Web site of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) (www.puk.org), one of the two Kurdish groups fighting for control of northern Iraq (Figure 39). The other group, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), does not appear to have its own presence on the Web, although there appear to be hundreds of Web pages in the German and Turkish languages regarding the PKK in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. A Dutch group claiming solidarity with the PKK maintains a site in the Netherlands (www.xs4all.nl/~stk/) that posts "official" PKK documents.



Figure 39. Map of the Republic of Iraq and Kurdish Areas

Determinants

The principal issues that have resulted in the lack of any connectivity in Iraq and that will affect any future developments are summarized in Table 72.

There appear to be conflicting opinions within the Iraqi government and academic community regarding the desirability of an Internet connection. At least the Foreign Ministry and the RDC were said to be attempting to gain Internet connections, without success, between 1991 and 1996.²⁸⁶ In November 1996, at the "10th Information Conference" in Baghdad, two Iraqi "experts

²⁸⁶ *ibid.*

in the field of information technology” announced that Iraq would be connected to the Internet “soon.”²⁸⁷

Table 72. Determinant Impact	
Determinant Quality	Affected Dimension
Form of government: Dictatorship; also determines Information and Security policies	Pervasiveness, Geographic Dispersion, Sectoral Absorption—Kept at zero, as no one is allowed access to information other than that provided by the government Organizational Infrastructure—Monopoly telecommunications sector prevents competition
International isolation	Pervasiveness, Connectivity Infrastructure—Kept at zero by government’s inability to obtain or pay for international connections to the Internet
Disregard for social equity	Pervasiveness, Geographic Dispersion, Sectoral Absorption, Sophistication of Use—All reduced or maintained at zero in order to satisfy the overriding needs of the regime (i.e., Saddam Hussein)
Anti-Internet stakeholder	Pervasiveness, Geographic Dispersion, Sectoral Absorption—Kept at zero in accordance with the demands of the most powerful stakeholder (Saddam); champions in the academic sector are powerless

However, the security services are reported to be concerned regarding the possibility that an Internet connection will make their job of monitoring and controlling the dissemination of information in Iraq more complicated.²⁸⁸ The Iraqi government has also used the Internet as an additional reason to criticize the activities of the United States in the region, referring to the Internet as “one of the American means to enter every house in the world,” and suggesting that the Internet was part of an American plot to control the world.²⁸⁹

On the other hand, the president’s oldest son, Uday, whose younger brother is reputed to be responsible for internal security,²⁹⁰ started a new weekly newspaper in mid-1997, *al-Zawra*, and used the first issue to criticize the government’s strict information control policies, including the ban on satellite television reception equipment, restrictions on the import of foreign newspapers and magazines, including those from other Arab countries, and the Internet policy. He concluded his editorial by stating that “if this continues, we will end up like one of Africa’s tribes.”²⁹¹ This may signal that the struggle for control within Iraq’s ruling “troika”—Saddam Hussein and his two eldest sons, Uday and Qusay—is becoming more open and that Uday, who reportedly has had his wings clipped following several years of increasingly outrageous behavior, is trying to muster public opinion to back an attempt to reclaim his former status.

²⁸⁷ *Al-Jumhuriyah* (11 November 1996), p. 3, as translated in FBIS-NES-96-228, *Daily Report: Near East & South Asia* (26 November 1996), via World News Connection. The conference was sponsored jointly by the Iraqi and Jordanian Library Associations.

²⁸⁸ Jirjees, *op. cit.*

²⁸⁹ *Al-Jumhuriyah* (17 February 1997), as reported by the Associated Press (17 February 1997).

²⁹⁰ Sean Boyne, “Inside Iraq’s security network,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review* 9 (July 1997), p. 312.

²⁹¹ *Al-Zawra* (14 June 1997), as reported by the Associated Press (14 June 1997).

Just because the Internet is not permitted in Iraq, however, doesn't mean that the Iraqi government is unwilling to make some use of it. A Worldwide Web home page (www.chat.com.jo/iraq), with links to several photographs (Figure 40) and the text of Saddam's birthday speech, was created to commemorate Saddam Hussein's 60th birthday.²⁹² The host server was publicly advertised by its IP address, 196.27.0.22, which effectively disguised its location. However, the server is not located in Iraq, but belongs to Nahj Computer Services as part of its Arabia OnLine service, and is located in Jordan. E-mail sent to Saddam in response to the Web site is printed out in Amman and delivered to Baghdad in batches by vehicle.



Figure 40.

Problems and Prospects

As long as the regime of Saddam Hussein remains in power in Iraq, backed as it is by some of the most oppressive and omni-present internal security organizations in the world, there is little prospect that the Iraqi public, which the security services attempt to prevent watching foreign television broadcasts, will be allowed to access the Internet. Modems are illegal and are likely to remain so, along with any and all other methods that could provide Iraqis with independent sources of information. Its ability to make Iraqis believe the government's pronouncements depends critically on its ability to prevent Iraqis from having access to other information sources.

Saddam on the Internet

The government no doubt has an interest in acquiring access to foreign industrial, scientific, and medical information, and the academic community continues to desire contact with its foreign colleagues, but the regime's (legitimate) fears for its survival have generated strict information control requirements that prevent even relatively trusted government officials from having routine access to foreign information sources. Thus, if the government intends to attempt to benefit from the Internet, it is mostly likely to do so by establishing a small, trusted, and closely supervised central information collection organization that would attempt to fulfill government's and academia's information requirements without running the risk of having too many people in contact with foreigners or their suspected propaganda.

²⁹² "Saddam goes on-line," *Middle East Communications* 12 (July 1997), p. 8.